

Jo Anne Van Tilburg. 1992. *HMS Topaze on Easter Island, Hoa Hakananai'a and Five Other Museum Sculptures in Archaeological Context* (with drawings of Easter Island statues by Cristián Arévalo Pakarati). Occasional Paper 73, Department of Ethnography, British Museum. 207 pp., 12 pl., 87 figs., 1 fold-out table. £12.

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During the first sixty years of the nineteenth century, a deep silence blanketed Easter Island despite visits by numerous ships; this silence was to be shattered by the cries of the victims of the genocide of 1862-63, which unleashed an international reaction. The subsequent work of the missionaries is known from a few dozen pages, extremely precious for the rare information they contain on the islanders' mythology and religion; according to Catholic tradition, Brother Eugène Eyraud is supposed to have received--as a last sacrament on his deathbed, August 19th 1868--the news that the conversion of Easter Island's population was complete (but if this was true, he cannot have been unaware of the fact!). It is against this background that one must place the visit, in October/November 1868, of HMS *Topaze*, in the course of which detailed new "secular" observations were made, 82 years after those of La Pérouse; we owe this new information primarily to J. Linton Palmer, surgeon on the *Topaze*, but also to his commander, Richard Ashmore Powell, the paymaster Richard Sainthill, and lieutenants H.V. Barclay and Colin M. Dundas.

So one can see how fascinating it would be to have a new historical, analytical and critical examination of the data gathered in a society that was actively engaged in restructuring itself, in the context of Christianization and permanent relations with Europeans. Unfortunately, despite its title, this is not the subject of Jo Anne Van Tilburg's work, which devotes only 18 pages to the *Topaze's* stay and its contribution to our understanding of the island's past; and five of these pages are reserved for the "star", one might almost say the pretext, of the whole paper--that is, Hoa Hakananai'a. Indeed the name of this superb statue, displayed in the foyer of London's Museum of Mankind, appears in the subtitle, which it would not be advisable to omit in bibliographies, since the paper is principally devoted to the monumental statues that do not come from Rano Raraku, and especially to six of them which are housed in museums: the British Museum (2 statues), the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire in Brussels, the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, and the Museo Nacional de Historia Natural in Santiago (2 statues).

Everybody knows Van Tilburg's classic work, *Power and Symbol* (UCLA 1986), on the statues in situ. This new study enables the specialist in Easter Island's monolithic sculpture to remind us of the principal results that emerged from her first work, as well as to take a fresh look at her interpretations, enrich them with linguistic considerations and make

comparisons with evidence from other Polynesian islands (mainly Mangareva in the Gambiers, Mangaia and Pukapuka in the Cook Islands, the Tuamotus, and, where necessary, the Marquesas, Tonga and Samoa) and from Micronesian islands. Basing herself on these arguments (those involving linguistics sometimes seemed very flimsy to me, but I am not a specialist), she emphasizes the different symbolic levels of the crescent motif, the dorsal and lumbar motifs, the forked signs, the representations of vulvas and the meaning of the *pukao*.

A chronology is proposed for the statues carved out of materials other than those of Rano Raraku: according to this chronology, the statues of red scoria, which are already present in the earliest *ahu moai* phase, have the greatest geographical and chronological spread: some were still standing in cult sites at the time of the visits by Palmer and even Alphonse Pinart (1877). The trachyte statues all come from Poike, and their erection in this spot could have been inspired by that of the Spanish crosses in 1770. Some basalt statues seem to be linked both to the island's western area, to the birdman cult and to the depiction of vulvas, and hence, according to the author, to a relatively recent phase in the island's history.

The author's point of view on the chronology of the statues and the evolution of the cults is very interesting, even if the dating of the major events in the island's history or that of artifacts like Tukuturi, for example, remains archaeologically highly conjectural. This is a very solid piece of work in terms of documentation; however, since it deals primarily with art and its interpretation, it is quite naturally filled with subjective judgments: hence, it is purely personal choice that makes the author consider the protuberance placed between the hands of Pou Hakanonoga to be a big clitoris rather than a small penis....



## Film Review

Hollywood at the Center of the World:  
A Review of *Rapa Nui*  
James Hynes

*A Tig Productions /Majestic Films Production*  
Directed by Kevin Reynolds

I

I suppose I ought to begin by saying what this review is not. It is not about the effect of the filmmakers on the life and culture of the island, nor is it about the effect of the filmmaking itself on the island's ecology and archaeological sites. These sorts of things ought to be reported on by those who live there, or by archaeologists and anthropologists who know the island more intimately than I do. I am a novelist, and my interest in Rapa Nui and its history arises from my current project, an historical novel about Jacob Roggeveen, centered around his visit to the island in 1722. I visited the island myself for three weeks in October of 1992; the last week of my visit coincided with the first visit to the island of

the film's production team, and though I heard stories about them and flew back to Santiago on the same plane with them, I did not meet or speak with any of them.

What follows, then, is simply my opinion of the film, from the point of view of someone who knows the island and is fascinated with its history, who has read much of the literature on the island, and who is a dyed-in-the-blood movie fan.

## II

*Rapa Nui*, Warner Bros.'s epic film of prehistoric Easter Island, opened in the United States on September 7 of this year, to some of the most sarcastic reviews I've ever seen. Janet Maslin of the *New York Times* wrote of the film's "cheesy props and faux primitivism" and "the sound of ridiculous dialogue lingering in the air." Noting that one of the film's producers was Kevin Costner, Maslin went on to say that *Rapa Nui* surpassed *Wyatt Earp*, Costner's disastrously dull epic western, as "the movie debacle of the summer." Reviews in other major cities were equally dismissive, with Roger Ebert in the *Chicago Sun Times* playfully suggesting that he might have called *Rapa Nui* the worst film ever made if it weren't for all the bare female breasts attractively on display, while another Chicago reviewer compared the film's account of the Long Ears versus the Short Ears to Dr. Seuss's story of the Sneetches. As well as being a critical failure, the film died at the box office in the U.S., playing on sixteen screens nationwide and grossing only \$272,606 in a four week run (according to *Variety*). It did about the same in Australia, where it played last spring, and somewhat better in Europe over the spring and summer, especially in Italy, where it made \$3.5 million. Still, according to the weekly grosses in *Variety*, the film made only about \$7.5 million worldwide (as of October 28), against a reported cost (in *People*) of \$20 million.

The reverse snob in me wishes I could report that *Rapa Nui* is an underrated and misunderstood gem, but the reviews are largely correct. Since I knew it would never make it to a theater near me, I drove to Chicago from my home in Ann Arbor to see it on a big screen before it came out on video, and as I sat in a plush but nearly empty theater on the last night of its run in Chicago, I hoped that at least the movie would be silly enough to be entertaining. But as the film's story unfolded, in Panavision and Dolby, I found myself bored at first--by the film's lack of imagination and its relentless retailing of clichés--and then, as the film went on, positively angry. It's one thing to make a cheesy epic with leaden dialogue, but it's another entirely to so badly misrepresent the island's culture and history.

Now this is a tricky issue, and I ought to know: as someone who is writing his own fictional narrative based on the island's history, I am aware on a daily basis of the tension between hewing to the historical facts and telling a rich, complicated, dramatic story. I've always found it a bit unfair when critics of books or movies based on real events take the author or filmmaker to task for not telling the "truth." Not only does this beg the question of what the truth might be, it betrays an ignorance of how art and literature work, namely

that it is the prerogative, even a requirement, of the artist to rearrange or alter the facts in the attempt to get at a sort of truth that history cannot. Tolstoy's *War and Peace* may not be strictly accurate by the standards of a professional historian, but it tells us things about Napoleon's invasion of Russia that only a novelist could. Or to take a more apropos example, David Lean's epic *Lawrence of Arabia* is a model of what critic Edward Said has called "Orientalism": it vastly oversimplifies the facts of the Arab Revolt, romanticizes and condescends shamelessly to its "exotic" Arab characters, and frankly mythologizes Lawrence himself (who in real life was a much more conniving, self-promoting, and calculating figure than Peter O'Toole's neurotic idealist). And yet it's still a great movie, not only because it was written and made with consummate skill, but because it says something provocative and unsentimental about the mind of the imperialist, even if it isn't the mind of the real Lawrence.

To put it simply, the artist making this sort of narrative has roughly two choices: to make it accurate, at the cost of making it less dramatic, or to make it spectacularly well, and to hell with the facts. The problem with *Rapa Nui*, finally, and what provoked me from boredom to anger, is that it does neither of these things. It is not only bad history, it's bad storytelling as well.

The problem with the film begins with the script, which you can read for yourself in the book that accompanies the release of the film, *Rapa Nui: The Easter Island Legend on Film*. Like a lot of Hollywood films, the script is a collaboration which is not really a collaboration. The original version was by a British writer, Tim Rose Price, and it was rewritten--while the film was being shot, apparently--by the director, Kevin Reynolds, whose idea the film originally was. So while it's not exactly clear where the fault lies, the result is hackneyed and derivative, owing more to the tradition of the Hollywood epic of the exotic than to the history of Rapa Nui. The story is a combination of a largely discredited legend, Romeo and Juliet, trendy environmentalism, and, oddest of all, a sort of vulgar Marxism reminiscent of the Popular Front of the 30s.

The story of the film is based on the hoary old legend of the Long Ears and Short Ears, and revolves around the friendship between a carefree aristocratic Long Ear prince, Noro (Hawaiian actor Jason Scott Lee), and a gritty, proletarian Short Ear laborer called Make (Puerto Rican actor Esai Morales). The story is set late in the island's prehistory, not long before the arrival of the Dutch, and the Long Ears are ruling the roost and lording it over the Short Ears. The Ariki-mau, the Long Ear king who is also Noro's grandfather (Maori actor Eru Potaka-Dewes), spends his time practicing rituals intended to bring the return of Hotu Matua's legendary white canoe, while young Noro spends his time body-surfing on his *totoro* reed float. Meanwhile Make and the oppressed Short Ears are forced to work in the statue quarry at Rano Raraku, building a *moai* larger than any other built so far, the better to attract the return of Hotu Matua. Their ration of sweet potatoes, provided by the Long Ear guards, is continually being shortened, even as they are forced to work

longer and harder. Noro and Make's boyhood friendship is sorely tested not only by the politics of the situation, but by the fact that both of them are in love with Ramana, a beautiful Short Ear girl (a Eurasian actress from Canada named Sandrine Holt).

This is the basic situation of the film, rather laboriously worked out in the first half hour or so. After that, it gets even more complicated: Noro wants to marry Ramana against his grandfather's wishes; the Short Ear workers down tools after a sort of prehistoric industrial accident in which one of them is killed, demanding better rations and the right to participate in the upcoming birdman ceremony; and Tupa (Maori actor George Henare), the high priest of the island and the Ariki-mau's right-hand man, pours lies and innuendo into the ear of his boss about both of these situations, conniving at grasping power himself. All of this--the rights of the Short Ears, the hand of Ramana, the leadership of the island--gets tied up rather vaguely with the annual birdman ceremony, in which Noro and Make compete head-to-head, along with a handful of predictably doomed-to-die minor characters, for the hand of Ramana and the leadership of the island.

Noro is trained for the race by the island's canoe maker, Haoa (Maori actor Zac Wallace), who not only shows Noro the ropes of the birdman rite, but reveals to Noro the truth about his father, who disappeared from the island in disgrace when Noro was young. Meanwhile Make trains at night and works on the giant *moai* by day, and Ramana is lowered into the Cave of the White Virgins for the duration. The finished *moai* is moved from the quarry to the *ahu* of the Long Ears, necessitating the cutting down of the last tree on the island, which happens to bear on its trunk a carving testifying to the love of Noro and Ramana.

The story climaxes with the birdman ceremony, the one sequence of the film that works reasonably well. It's a bravura action sequence, with nearly naked stuntmen racing down the real cliff at Orongo, swimming to Motu Nui, fighting each other there for the egg of the frigate bird, and swimming back to be first up the cliff with an intact egg. All the contestants die except Noro and Make--as a result of murder, shark attack, or a long drop off the cliff--and Make nearly wins but for a fateful stumble at the top of the cliff.

Noro wins on points, so to speak, but before a riot can develop between the cocky Long Ears and the furious Short Ears, the Ariki-mau jumps up, crying "The white canoe!" and pointing to an iceberg that is fortuitously passing below the cliff. He and several retainers row out to the iceberg and sail away to "salvation" on the berg.

In the last few minutes of the movie, Tupa the priest makes a grab for power and is killed by Make, which starts an orgy of violent revenge. The Short Ears pull down the Long Ear *moai*, wipe out the Long Ears in a reenactment of the (probably apocryphal) Battle of the Poike Ditch, and, to Make's disgust, turn to cannibalism and eat their former oppressors. Finally Noro and Ramana, who has just given birth to Noro's child, sail away in a canoe that Haoa has made for them, and a final credit announces that "Archaeological evidence indicates that Pitcairn Island may have been settled from Easter Island--some 1,500 hundred miles to the east."

If all this sounds bewilderingly melodramatic in summary, believe me, it is even kitschier in the execution. Apart from the myriad inaccuracies, oversimplifications, and flat out distortions of the island's history, which I'll get to in a moment, the movie is finally a parade of one howling anachronism after another. Starving Short Ear laborers protest to their Long Ear overseer that "You promised us thirty percent of the harvest!" And in their final conversation as friends, Make cries out to Noro, "I don't need your Long Ear handouts anymore!" My favorite though, and the one line most often quoted in the reviews, comes when the Ariki-mau is confronted by a mob of rebellious Short Ears; he turns to his advisor, raised his bloody hands, and says, "I don't need this, priest. I have chicken entrails to read."

The performances only contribute to the anachronism; all the major players seem to have wandered in from other movies. The two American leads are surprisingly engaging but humorless; they seem to be trying to take this bushwa seriously. Jason Scott Lee, who looks terrific in his loincloth, is all puppydog earnestness, while Esai Morales gives his character a contemporary, urban swagger that is more *West Side Story* than prehistoric Rapa Nui (though he may not be far off the mark; the Long Ears and the Short Ears are really just the Jets and Sharks redux). After a couple of scenes in the first half hour, including a mild love scene in the grass with Jason Scott Lee, poor Sandrine Hold disappears for most of the rest of the movie into the Cave of the White Virgins, to reemerge near the end covered with prosthetic cold sores. The only performers who look like they are having fun are Potaka-Dewes and Henare. The dithering king and his evil advisor is one of the oldest clichés of storytelling, but these two play it with zest, as if they were doing Gilbert and Sullivan; I'm only guessing, of course, but they seem to have figured out early on just how campy this stuff was and acted accordingly. Only Zac Wallace (best known for his powerful performance in the vastly superior New Zealand film *Utu*) imbues his character with any real dignity, and the scene where he shows Noro a spar from a European ship, thus proving the existence of an outside world, is one of the few genuinely mysterious and moving moments in the film.

The rest of the elements of the film are noteworthy for evoking the memory of earlier and often equally silly epics, rather than showing any insight into the actual history or culture of Rapa Nui. A few examples will suffice: the Long Ears as decadent aristos and the Short Ears as angry proles are in direct descent from the Egyptians and the Jews of any number of Biblical epics from the 50s, in particular Howard Hawk's *Land of the Pharaohs*, a deliriously goofy film which only proves that even great filmmakers can stumble occasionally (and great novelists: William Faulkner helped write the screenplay). And the scene in which the giant *moai* breaks free of the cliff face and crushes a poor carver comes straight from the great granddaddy of silly epics, Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments*, in which at least one poor Jewish slave is flattened by a runaway block destined for a pyramid. The training sequence, in which Noro and Make run up and down hills, climb cliffs, and practice diving, lacks only the theme from *Rocky*, with poor Zac Wallace, who



deserves better, in the Burgess Meredith role.

I could go on with this sort of thing, but the point should be clear: even if one knows nothing about the history of the island, the film is instantly recognizable as a certain kind of outdated Hollywood kitsch, in which hundreds of scantily clad extras provide the exotic backdrop to anachronistic dialogue performed in the service of spectacle. The locations are gorgeous, the photography handsome, the sets and costumes museum perfect, and the narrative is pure, undiluted melodrama straight out of the silent era.

### III

If that were all there was to it, the film could be laughed off, but what makes its failure more serious is that the film profoundly misrepresents the history and culture of the island. Given that *Rapa Nui* may have a long life on video, and serve as a sort of introduction to the island to people who haven't the patience to read Scoresby-Routledge or Bahn and Flenley, it is liable to have a long term effect on the island that may even surpass the impact on the island of the filming itself. Consequently, the filmmakers had a responsibility here that they have failed at every opportunity. At every point in the story, they have taken a kernel of truth--and made the most predictable and clichéd leap of the imagination from it.

Even without the bibliography provided in the back of the movie book, it's possible to guess what books they read, and what they took from them. The whole Long Ears/Short Ears situation is taken completely uncritically from *Aku-Aku*; I suppose that at this late date, only Hollywood would take Heyerdahl's work at face value. Yet as Fr. Englert argued (as cited in Bahn and Flenley), the original Polynesian terms, "*hanau eepe*" and "*hanau momoko*," may not even mean "long ear" and "short ear", but "broad/strong/corpulent people" and "slender people," and Barthel's work (again, cited in Bahn and Flenley) seems to indicate that the *Hanau Momoko* were the dominant people and the *Hanau Eepe* the underlings. Either way, the whole story is clearly only the echo of a cultural and political situation that was much richer and more complex than the reductive version in the film. In a narrative made up of silly anachronisms, nothing is sillier or more anachronistic than the scene in which the Short Ear statue carvers down tools and march en masse on the Long Ear village, for all the world like the striking mine workers in *Germinal* marching on the pithead. Once again, only Hollywood would see social conflict in a highly spiritual, rigidly hierarchical Polynesian culture through the European, vulgar Marxist lens of industrial class struggle, as sweaty proletarians versus the corrupt bosses. The Maoris playing the ditzy Ariki-mau and the corrupt priest are at their most hilarious in this scene, a burlesque version of Louis XIV and Cardinal Richelieu, while Esai Morales is at his most swaggering and self-righteous, Jimmy Hoffa in a loincloth. Indeed, in the movie book, Morales calls his character "the Che Guevara of Easter Island," a remark that demonstrates a misunderstanding of both Che Guevara and of Easter Island, but which also amply demonstrated the filmmakers' attitude toward representing a non-Western culture: confronted with a culture and a history that are not instinctively intelligible to

a Western understanding, they have simply distorted the most recognizable features into something that looks Western. If the real class war on Rapa Nui was strange and complex to a Western understanding, then to hell with it: we'll turn it into something we do understand, i.e., something we've seen before, the Israelites versus the Egyptians, the Molly Maguires versus West Virginia mineowners, the Morlocks versus the Eloi.

Even when their hearts are in the right place, the filmmakers grotesquely oversimplify. Another book they clearly have read was Bahn and Flenley's *Easter Island, Earth Island*, and from that book's sophisticated ecological argument they have fileted something banal and reductive. Noro, who even in the context of the film is no rocket scientist (you should pardon the anachronism), is provided with a nascent ecological consciousness that is exemplified mainly by a lot of painfully preachy dialogue, which can be summed up more or less as "Maybe we shouldn't cut down all the trees." Of course, it isn't the filmmakers' fault that Easter Island has lately become the metaphor *du jour* for global ecological collapse--you can hardly read an article about the dwindling rain forest these days without coming across a reference to those short-sighted Easter Islanders who trashed their island and started eating each other--but surely there is a more subtle way to evoke it than to show Noro literally hugging the last tree (with its Noro-loves-Ramana hieroglyphic) as Make and the rest of the angry proles approach it with stone axes. Once again, the moment has nothing to do with what might really have happened, but is simply Earth Firsters versus working class lumberjacks. Certainly the film's intentions are noble here, but in this case the road to hell is paved with palm logs.

But at least the Long Ear/Short Ear conflict and the ecological message are based on something they read, no matter how credulously or uncritically. It's when they rely on their imaginations that the filmmakers really get into trouble. As this late date, of course, no one really knows all the details of what went on at the birdman ceremony; any filmmaker or writer could reasonably argue that any version of the ritual they come up with is simply their interpretation. And there's nothing fundamentally wrong with their compressing a rite that took days or weeks--as the contestants camped out on Motu Nui, waiting for the birds to arrive--into a single day, for dramatic purposes. But not all interpretations are created equal, especially those that are based on old movies rather than an understanding of Polynesian culture. In the film, on the night before the race begins, the islanders troop up to Orongo by torchlight (another shocking waste of wood), light big fires, and dance lasciviously, in the way that pagan savages always do in big budget spectacles. The most charitable way to describe this scene is that it's not much worse than the sort of "authentic Polynesian ritual" you might see at a hotel *luau* in Honolulu; but in a harsher light it's pure Hollywood ooga-booga racism from the 30s, the darkies dancing wildly the night before they offer the white woman to King Kong.

Then, of course, there's the iceberg, the White Canoe of

*Hotu Matua*, a piece of Hollywood exoticism that has no basis in the oral tradition of *Rapa Nui*. Perhaps they were thinking of the Aztecs and the return of Quetzacoatl; certainly this wholly invented legend smacks of Heyerdahl's spurious parallelism, his obsession with fair-skinned voyagers from the east. Just for the record, Rapa Nui is about three and a half degrees south of the Tropic of Capricorn, which makes it a subtropical island; imagining an iceberg there during the southern spring (which is when the birdman ceremony took place) is like imagining icebergs off Miami Beach in April. My guess is that the filmmakers also read Grant McCall's *Rapanui*, and took his theory of the Little Ice Age affecting the culture of the island a little too literally. Which, once again, shows the depth of sophistication at work here: glancing through McCall, someone saw the Little Ice Age in passing, and *voilà!* We are presented with a cheesy-looking iceberg (shot in Sydney harbor, according to the movie book), which looks more like what it is--chicken wire and tarpaulin--than anything that ever calved off of an Antarctic glacier.

The most ironic thing about a film like this is the amount of first rate technical support that is mustered on behalf of a mediocre script and direction. The cinematography, by Stephen F. Windon, is very handsome; if you can't afford the airfare, watching *Rapa Nui* may be the next best thing to going to the island. Most of the film was shot at Orongo, Rano Raraku, and at an *ahu* constructed for the film along the south coast near Rano Raraku, and while I'm no expert on the archaeology of the island, the reconstructed villages look pretty authentic. The costumes also look well-researched, though, again, I'm no expert. The movie's *moai*, on the other hand, are pretty unconvincing, especially whenever they stray into the same shot as the real thing; even erected on the film's *ahu*, they look insubstantial, as if a good stiff breeze (of which there is no shortage on Rapa Nui) would blow them over. And despite the best efforts of the filmmakers--hundreds of extras straining at ropes like Israelites in a DeMille picture, the thunderous rumble of the palm logs added in post-production--the giant *moai* being dragged along upright across the landscape looks more like a float in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade than anything carved out of stone; in fact, if you squint, it kinda looks like Bart Simpson.

In the end, the failure of *Rapa Nui* is that, while it sweats the details, it fundamentally and willfully misreads what those details add up to. A final example will suffice: one of the opening shots of the film is a striking helicopter shot, the camera rushing over the waves toward the tall black cliff at Orongo. As the camera nears the island, and the music soars, the camera rises up the face of the cliff to reveal three *moai* with their eyes in place, gazing out to sea. This shot represents the film in a nutshell: it's sweeping, dramatic, exotic, and dead wrong. I could quibble about any number of details here--the fact that apart from a single *moai* found embedded in one of the ceremonial houses, there were no *moai* ever erected in plain sight at Orongo; that except for ceremonial occasions, the *moai* probably did not "wear" their eyes--but what's most telling is that those *moai* are facing out to sea. One of the first things those of us who are fascinated

with the island's history ever learn about the island is that, apart from a few exceptions, the *moai* that were finished, moved, and erected on *ahu*--the *moai* imbued with *mana*, in other words--always faced inland. This is not a trivial distinction; to show *moai* facing outward in the opening shots of a film about the island shows a fundamental misunderstanding of the island's culture. The power of the *moai*, the *mana* that they embodied or represented, was directed inward, not out toward a larger world which the islanders for the most part did not recognize. For better or for worse, this was a culture whose energies were directed in upon itself; they were not waiting for the White Canoe or the return of Hotu Matua to rescue them, and they were certainly not looking for "salvation"--the Ariki-mau actually uses the word as he sails off on the iceberg--a Christian concept that as far as I know has no correlate in Polynesia. Yet in the film, those characters whose attention is directed inward, to the island, are the most brutish and deluded--Make on the one hand and Tupa on the other--while those characters who are looking for an excuse and a way to leave--the Ariki-mau, Haoa, and, finally, Noro and his new family--are depicted most sympathetically. Not only does this misrepresent the actual history of the island--those islanders who were taken away against their will during the slave trading of the nineteenth century often fought like hell to come back--but it completely undercuts the film's central metaphor, that of Easter Island as a parable for the fate of the earth. Having gone to some pains, however crudely, to warn the viewer of the dangers of trashing one's environment, the filmmakers give Noro and Ramana and their new baby a convenient, and wildly improbable, out: they load them up in a canoe and send them off to Pitcairn Island, where they can start afresh. Needless to say, if the earth is simply Easter Island writ large, giving up on the home planet--leaving it to the proles and the cannibals and the Morlocks--is not an option.

Worst of all, it represents a betrayal of the legacy of the island. As Grant McCall and others have pointed out, in spite of everything, in spite of civil war, ecological collapse, and the inevitable depredations wrought by Europeans--not the least of which are narratives like this--the Rapa Nui have survived. This is the inherent danger in using a real place and a living people as a metaphor for anything, and especially for millennial disaster. Because the bottom line is that the Rapa Nui did not wipe themselves out; they're still here, and God bless 'em, increasingly vocal about managing their own affairs and telling their own story, without any more help from the likes of Thor Heyerdahl or Kevin Reynolds (or probably even me). That is the real message of redemption to be taken away from the experience of *Rapa Nui, The Film*: that having survived the Little Ice Age, Peruvian slavers, smallpox, Edwardian anthropologists, cruise liners full of tourists, and the Chilean Navy, they will probably survive Warner Bros. as well.

